

# Theater Strategy and the Theater Campaign Plan: Both Are Essential

WILLIAM W. MENDEL

This is an era in which the Joint Staff is placing new emphasis on joint interoperability.<sup>1</sup> Yet, one theater commander plans to employ joint forces according to his theater campaign plan, while another, eschewing campaigns, plans to conduct joint operations based largely on his “warfighting strategy.” What gives? Shouldn’t there be a binding joint doctrine for preparing the CINC’s theater for war? Shouldn’t a CINC have both a theater strategy and a campaign plan?<sup>2</sup> The answer to both questions in my opinion is yes.

Although our theater commanders have long held a propensity to do things their own way, joint planning doctrine ought to evolve into a more centralized methodology than seen in past years. This paper provides one vision of the proper relationship between theater strategy and related campaign plans. I would not pretend it is the only or even the best vision, but I do hope it will enjoin serious thought and discussion as we begin the process of building the joint doctrine that will carry our unified forces into the next century.<sup>3</sup>

The Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986, the 1987 Senate hearings on national security strategy, and the President’s *National Security Strategy* report for 1988 have encouraged a resurgence of interest in national military strategy, joint interoperability, and our unified warfighting effectiveness at the strategic and operational levels of war.<sup>4</sup> But they do not deal with such gut questions as why theater commanders might need a strategy too in view of the presence of a controlling *national* military strategy which relates political goals to theater missions.

Our national military strategy has its origins in our national interests—our collective sense of concerns and values as a nation. Manifest in various official declarations, these political, military, economic, and socio-psychological sensings have remained largely constant since World War II. The

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President's unclassified statement titled *National Security Strategy*, which includes economic, informational, diplomatic, and military facets, broadly translates our national interests into strategic concepts and objectives. This and the classified National Security Decision Directives of the National Security Council provide the basis for developing our *mid-term* (three to ten years) national military strategy.<sup>5</sup> This mid-term military strategy is published as the Joint Strategic Planning Document (JSPD).

With a relatively low-risk, balanced strategy setting forth objectives, military concepts, and proposed resources, the JSPD "provides 'reasonable assurance' of being capable of executing the national military strategy."<sup>6</sup> It sets the stage for the Secretary of Defense's "Defense Guidance" and the Department of Defense programming system that will (ideally) build the resources required by this mid-term strategy. As the JSPD is being put together, the CINCs participate in its development and review. The CINCs' views of the appropriate JSPD objectives, concepts, and resources are based on their own strategy for their assigned theater or Area of Responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning with those US national interests that pertain to his theater, each individual CINC draws upon regional assessments in formulating his strategy. Of course, for the sake of completeness, he must also consider the *current* (i.e. short-range, covering one to two years) national military strategy as set forth in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP). The JSCP is the most specific tasking document affecting planning by the combatant commands, setting forth as it does military tasks based on projected capabilities and conditions in the immediate future. It thus becomes a foundational document in the deliberate planning process. The CINC's theater strategy applies to his entire area of responsibility throughout periods of peace, crisis, and war. Because some portions of his theater may remain at peace while others concurrently experience war at various levels of conflict, his theater strategy must be broad in scope, and set the stage for a variety of political-military endeavors. It serves to establish in peacetime those conditions that will facilitate military operations in war and the war termination process at the end of active warfighting. The CINC's strategy provides broad conceptual guidance for deterrence and prosecution of regional war and smaller conflicts, as well as direction for security assistance, support for treaties and agreements, the development of good relations with nonaligned nations, and expanding US influence throughout the theater. These functions suggest a collateral or bonus

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function of a theater strategy: the potential for linking all the elements of national power (political, economic, socio-psychological, military) into a coordinated whole to achieve theater strategic objectives for the nation. Although he lacks direct authority over affairs of state and commerce, the CINC's strategy should be the locus of national effort, especially in time of war.

The CINC's theater strategy looks ahead. It must do so if it is to properly influence the Defense programming and budgeting system as well as provide for long-range attention to activities within the theater, which are always dynamic. The strategy provides a reason for programming the types and amounts of resources (e.g. war materiel, aircraft carrier battle groups, divisions) needed to execute his strategy with a reasonable assurance of success. Projects in the theater (e.g. nation-building, combined exercise programs) take time to plan and execute, and resources should be programmed for these too. Since 1984, the CINC's submission of Integrated Priority Lists to the Defense Resources Board has given the unified commands a voice in the program review process. Clearly with an Integrated Priority List based soundly upon a cogent and compelling theater strategy, a CINC can better win the support of the Defense Resources Board, which meets to review his recommendations as well as conflicting service positions on program budget decisions.<sup>8</sup> As Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before US Senate hearings on the President's statement of national security strategy:

All of these considerations—our peacetime deterrent posture, transition from peace to war, and global warfighting capabilities—are addressed . . . by the Defense Resources Board. The DRB spends a great deal of time looking at the four pillars of defense: force structure, modernization, readiness, and sustainability, attempting to decide what investment will give . . . the highest return in decreasing risks.<sup>9</sup>

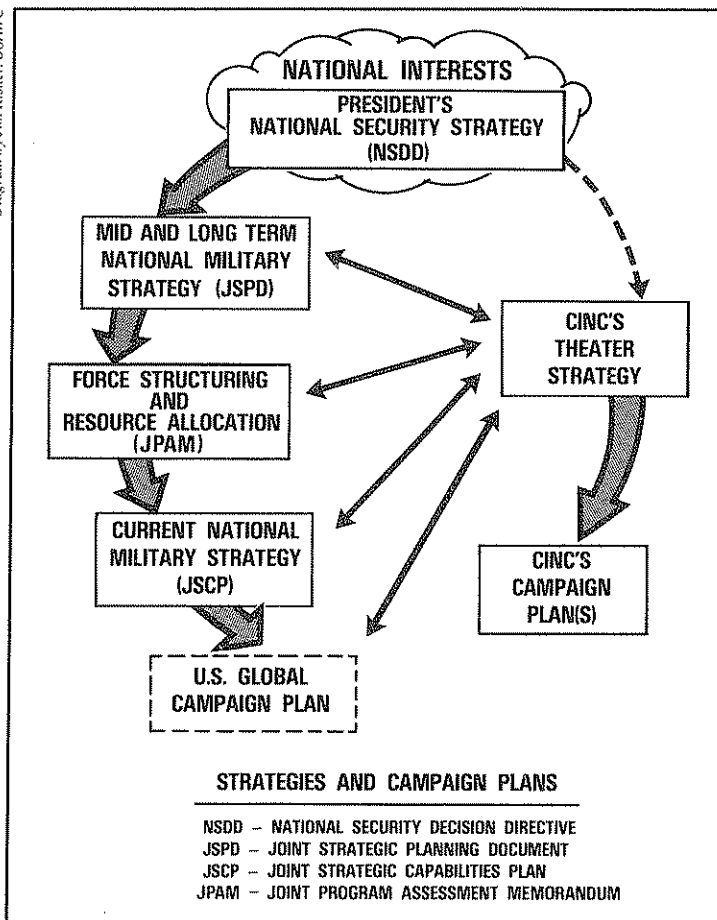
The CINC's strategy for his theater is expressed in general terms of ends, ways, and means, with such objectives as "deter war" and "protect the seaward approaches to North America"; such concepts as "US conventional forces will be forward deployed" and "naval presence will be maintained along sea lines of communications"; and such broad categories of resources as "Marine expeditionary forces" and "division force equivalents."<sup>10</sup> But such a strategy is necessarily too broad to serve as the express springboard for employing forces in combat. For this purpose, we turn to the campaign plan. When the scope of anticipated or planned joint force employment is sufficiently broad as to require a phased series of major operations to achieve strategic objectives—the normal case in today's unified theater commands—then a campaign plan must be developed as the guiding document that mediates between broad theater strategy and highly detailed operational plans. The campaign plan is based on the CINC's strategy and his assessment of the current and projected threat. As we have seen, his campaign plan may also support tasks

and objectives in the *current* national military strategy found in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan.

In addition to the JSCP strategy, the Joint Staff should develop a global campaign plan that would synchronize the regional plans of the CINCs with the objective of achieving a global approach to unity of command and economy of force. If a SECDEF global campaign plan were written, then the CINCs' strategies and campaign plans would support it too. The diagram below shows my proposed concept for relating strategies to campaign plans.

With so much as prologue, let us now review the several compelling reasons why *every theater CINC with an employment mission should develop both a theater strategy and a campaign plan*. First, a theater strategy, as such, is not an appropriate document for the employment of forces. As a statement of ends, ways, and means, such a strategy is broad and all-encompassing in nature. It provides the CINC's vision and overarching guidance for a myriad of activities that protect US interests in the area of responsibility. Though essential to outline what (objectives), how (concepts), and what's required (resources), a strategy surely lacks the operational direction by which to send

Diagram by Jim Kistler, USMC



forces into combat! Certainly a plan is required for the actual employment of forces.

Second, because of the way our nation has organized itself to go to war sequentially (i.e. mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment), the CINC will nearly always need to develop a campaign plan to dovetail with and carry to logical fruition the complicated preparatory steps set in motion at the National Command Authority, DOD, and JCS levels.<sup>11</sup> As Admiral Crowe has said:

In general war planning, the fact is that our current force structure would not initially permit us to fight on all fronts or to look after all of our global interests simultaneously. US commanders will be faced with a number of difficult decisions and will be forced to prioritize their wartime tasks. They will of necessity initially be seeking victory through sequential rather than simultaneous campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

Scarce assets will not at once be available; operations will have to be phased and resources carefully allocated in order to achieve strategic objectives. The campaign plan provides the CINC's vision for phasing a series of related major operations and their sustainment to achieve his strategic aims. From an assessment of his area of responsibility, the CINC discerns strategic threats: those potential military challenges that place at risk US national interests. Through his visualization of enemy forces, geography, and potential lines of operation, the CINC's concept for theater design and command relationships emerge; and with his broad concept for operations comes the need for the campaign plan(s). No amorphous statement of theater "strategy" could ever hope to embody such essential planning parameters.

Third, there may need to be several campaign plans within a CINC's area of responsibility: plans for his theater of war and subordinate theaters of operations. If the CINC's assessment identifies only a single strategic threat, the CINC might elect to be the "warfighter" himself and direct the major operations of his land, sea, and air components by means of his phased campaign plan. In this case a theater of war would be designated by the CINC (approved by the National Command Authorities), and it could well be an area which is less than the whole of his total area of responsibility.

Should two strategic threats be identified along two distinct lines of operation, however, the CINC's theater organization could include two subordinate joint forces (perhaps subordinate unified commands) tasked to employ service components in theaters of operations. Indeed, he might also develop a third joint force (e.g. a Special Operations joint force) and theater of operations to resolve a low-intensity conflict in still a different part of his area.

Thus having assigned strategic objectives to subordinate joint force commanders, the CINC would need to coordinate these potentially disparate actions by means of his theater of war campaign plan. His campaign plan would phase unified operations and logistics in the theater of war. His subordinate

theater of operations commanders (probably subordinate unified commanders) would also develop campaign plans to phase joint operations in their theaters according to the CINC's campaign plan phases and apportioned resources.<sup>13</sup> Such campaign plans translate the broad concepts of the CINC's strategy for his area into detailed operational guidance for employing forces in combat.

While discussion of theater strategy and campaign plans has thus far focused on the US theater, these concepts for planning also apply to coalition models of theater warfare. In combined arenas, both the CINC of the Republic of Korea-United States Combined Forces Command and the CINCs of the NATO major commands (e.g. Supreme Allied Commander Europe) take their direction from military committees. In Korea, Strategic Directive Number One provides the broad guidance<sup>14</sup>; in NATO, Military Committee Document 14/3 serves this purpose.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that the CINC in Korea has a well-exercised campaign plan, while SACEUR and his major subordinate commanders have none.<sup>16</sup> For all the reasons discussed above, the combined CINCs also need theater strategies and the requisite campaign plans to translate their strategies into operational terms for subordinates.

In sum, there are good reasons for US and combined CINCs to have both theater strategies and campaign plans. The strategy provides vision and superintending guidance through peacetime, crisis, war, and resolution of conflict, and it provides the rationale for programming resources to support strategy and campaigns. Particularly important when Department of State and other government (or alliance) agencies do not organize on a regional or theater of war basis, the CINC's theater military strategy can harmonize the other elements of national or alliance power to achieve strategic aims.

The campaign plan translates broad strategic guidance into specific operational directions which are necessary to employ forces in combat; they phase major operations in accordance with available resources and the concept of operations; and they synchronize land, sea, and air operations.

Strategies and campaign plans are thus essential command and control instruments for theater deterrence and warfighting, and both must be given the attention they require for joint and combined success on future battlefields.

#### NOTES

1. The DOD Reorganization Act of 1986 has encouraged public interest and debate concerning unified actions of our armed forces within a strategic context and problems of resourcing our strategies.

2. William W. Mendel and Floyd T. Banks, *Campaign Planning* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: USAWC, Strategic Studies Institute, 1988), pp. 19-23 and 26-30. The locus of planning interest at US Pacific Command is the CINC's "Warfighting Strategy"; additional direction is provided in the USCINCPAC theater OPLAN. At US Central Command, planning activity is focused upon the CINC's campaign plan; the CINC's concepts of a theater strategy can be found within his "Posture Statement." The CINCs referred to in the present article are the commanders-in-chief of US unified commands: USCINCEUR, USCINCCENT, USCINCSOUTH, USCINCLANT, USCINCPAC. The ideas herein proposed could also apply to combined commanders-in-chief.

3. The Joint Staff's "Joint Doctrine Master Plan," under the aegis of the J7, will promulgate numerous publications over the next several years: a joint doctrine "Capstone" manual; "Keystone" manuals on in-

telligence, joint operations (the new JCS Pub 3), logistics, planning for joint operations, and communications; and twenty or so joint doctrine and "techniques" manuals concerning such operations as air interdiction, amphibious, riverine, counterair, barriers and mines, command/control/communications countermeasures, airspace control, operations security, and psychological operations.

4. US Congress, Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, PL 99-433, 1 October 1986. Section 104 requires that the President "transmit to Congress each year [on the day he submits the budget] . . . the national security strategy of the United States." The language of the act requires the report to include US interests, objectives, and strategic concepts ("short-term and long-term uses of . . . national power"). The report is required to include a discussion of our ability to effect the strategy but does not mandate a statement of the resources required. Presumably this is to be found in the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress and within the President's Budget. Also see US Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings on National Security Strategy*, 100th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: GPO, 1987), and Ronald Reagan, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington: The White House, January 1988).

5. National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 238 is the principal source for current guidance in developing the nation's military strategy. It influences *mid-term* strategy in the Joint Strategic Planning Document (JSPD) and *current* strategy in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP).

6. *Army Command and Management: Theory and Practice* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: USAWC, 19 August 1987), p. 14-3.

7. In this paper, the CINC's theater is identical to his Area of Responsibility (assigned to him in the JCS "Unified Command Plan"); "theater of war" is "that area of land, sea, and air which is, or may become, directly involved in the operations of war" (see JCS Pub 1, June 1987, p. 34). The theater of war may be only a part of the CINC's total theater/Area of Responsibility.

8. *Army Command and Management*, p. 14-3.

9. William J. Crowe, Jr., "Statement of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 21 January 1987, *Hearings on National Security Strategy*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., p. 270.

10. Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., Statement before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 13 January 1987, *Hearings on National Security Strategy*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 132-34.

11. The functions (e.g. mobilization, deployment, employment, sustainment) of the CINC's command is one key factor in determining what type of plan he needs. USCINCEUR, for example, provides US national support to the NATO warfighting commands which have the function of employment. In a NATO central Europe scenario, no USCINCEUR campaign plan is called for because it is a national command within the alliance command (which *should* have a campaign plan); however, should there develop a strategic threat to US national interests in Africa (outside NATO's area), a USCINCEUR unilateral campaign plan might be appropriate to counter this threat. Similarly, within the combined warfighting efforts of the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, a purely US force campaign plan is not appropriate.

12. Crowe, p. 269.

13. With a vast array of interests and responsibilities throughout his area, it seems unlikely that the theater CINC will put on his steel helmet and "fight" the war himself. Rather, he will organize his theater with subordinate joint force commanders in theaters of operations to employ US forces against the enemy. In order to guide the campaigns of his subordinate joint force commanders, the CINC could use a Letter of Instruction or similar instrument instead of a theater of war campaign plan. Nevertheless, the content should include the CINC's vision and intent for theater warfare; concepts for phasing campaigns/major operations and logistics; centers of gravity and strategic/operational objectives; and command relationships which provide *authority* to joint force commanders for synchronizing land, air, and sea efforts into a cohesive whole. The LOI could be an especially useful instrument after the war is ongoing.

14. Republic of Korea/United States Military Committee (Plenary Session), Secret ROK/US *Strategic Directive Number One* (Unclas) (San Diego, Calif., 1978).

15. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Military Committee Document 1413 (NATO Secret)*, *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area (NATO Unclassified)* (Brussels, Belgium, 22 September 1967). This conceptual document should be read with *Military Committee Document 4813 (NATO Secret)*, *Measures to Implement the Strategic Concept for the Defense of the NATO Area (NATO Unclassified)* (Brussels, Belgium, 6 May 1969).

16. Political factors within the "defensive" alliance have prevented the pursuit of campaign planning, which is popularly envisioned as evidence of offensive (aggressive) intent. For a detailed explanation of the reasons for the lack of campaign planning in NATO, see Mendel and Banks, pp. 38 and 48.